



I am He who howls in the night;  
I am He who moans in the snow;  
I am He who hath never seen light;  
I am He who mounts from below.

My car is the car of Death;  
My wings are the wings of dread;  
My breath is the north wind's breath;  
My prey are the cold and the dead.

In old Auvergne, when schools were poor and few,  
And peasants fancy'd what they scarcely knew,  
When lords and gentry shunn'd their Monarch's throne  
For solitary castles of their own,  
There dwelt a man of rank, whose fortress stood  
In the hush'd twilight of a hoary wood.  
De Blois his name; his lineage high and vast,  
A proud memorial of an honour'd past;  
But curious swains would whisper now and then  
That Sieur De Blois was not as other men.  
In person dark and lean, with glossy hair,  
And gleaming teeth that he would often bare,  
With piercing eye, and stealthy roving glance,  
And tongue that clipt the soft, sweet speech of France;  
The Sieur was little lov'd and seldom seen,  
So close he kept within his own demesne.  
The castle servants, few, discreet, and old,  
Full many a tale of strangeness might have told;  
But bow'd with years, they rarely left the door  
Wherein their sires and grandsires serv'd before.  
Thus gossip rose, as gossip rises best,  
When mystery imparts a keener zest;  
Seclusion oft the poison tongue attracts,  
And scandal prospers on a dearth of facts.  
'Twas said, the Sieur had more than once been spy'd  
Alone at midnight by the river's side,

With aspect so uncouth, and gaze so strange,  
That rustics cross'd themselves to see the change;  
Yet none, when press'd, could clearly say or know  
Just what it was, or why they trembled so.  
De Blois, as rumour whisper'd, fear'd to pray,  
Nor us'd his chapel on the Sabbath day;  
Howe'er this may have been, 'twas known at least  
His household had no chaplain, monk, or priest.  
But if the Master liv'd in dubious fame,  
Twice fear'd and hated was his noble Dame;  
As dark as he, in features wild and proud,  
And with a weird supernal grace endow'd,  
The haughty mistress scorn'd the rural train  
Who sought to learn her source, but sought in vain.  
Old women call'd her eyes too bright by half,  
And nervous children shiver'd at her laugh;  
Richard, the dwarf (whose word had little weight),  
Vow'd she was like a serpent in her gait,  
Whilst ancient Pierre (the aged often err)  
Laid all her husband's mystery to her.  
Still more absurd were those odd mutter'd things  
That calumny to curious list'ners brings;  
Those subtle slanders, told with downcast face,  
And muffled voice—those tales no man may trace;  
Tales that the faith of old wives can command,  
Tho' always heard at sixth or seventh hand.  
Thus village legend darkly would imply  
That Dame De Blois possess'd an evil eye;  
Or going further, furtively suggest  
A lurking spark of sorcery in her breast;  
Old Mère Allard (herself half witch) once said  
The lady's glance work'd strangely on the dead.  
So liv'd the pair, like many another two  
That shun the crowd, and shrink from public view.  
They scorn'd the doubts by ev'ry peasant shewn,  
And ask'd but one thing—to be let alone!

'Twas Candlemas, the dreariest time of year,  
With fall long gone, and spring too far to cheer,  
When little Jean, the bailiff's son and heir,

Fell sick and threw the doctors in despair.  
A child so stout and strong that few would think  
An hour might carry him to death's dark brink,  
Yet pale he lay, tho' hidden was the cause,  
And Galens search'd in vain thro' Nature's laws.  
But stricken sadness could not quite suppress  
The roving thought, or wrinkled grandam's guess:  
Tho' spoke by stealth, 'twas known to half a score  
That Dame De Blois rode by the day before;  
She had (they said) with glances weird and wild  
Paus'd by the gate to view the prattling child,  
Nor did they like the smile which seem'd to trace  
New lines of evil on her proud, dark face.  
These things they whisper'd, when the mother's cry  
Told of the end—the gentle soul gone by;  
In genuine grief the kindly watcher wept,  
Whilst the lov'd babe with saints and angels slept.  
The village priest his simple rites went thro',  
And good Michel nail'd up the box of yew;  
Around the corpse the holy candles burn'd,  
The mourners sighed, the parents dumbly yearn'd.  
Then one by one each sought his humble bed,  
And left the lonely mother with her dead.  
Late in the night it was, when o'er the vale  
The storm-king swept with pandemoniac gale;  
Deep pil'd the cruel snow, yet strange to tell,  
The lightning sputter'd while the white flakes fell;  
A hideous presence seem'd abroad to steal,  
And terror sounded in the thunder's peal.  
Within the house of grief the tapers glow'd  
Whilst the poor mother bow'd beneath her load;  
Her salty eyes too tired now to weep,  
Too pain'd to see, too sad to close in sleep.  
The clock struck three, above the tempest heard,  
When something near the lifeless infant stirr'd;  
Some slipp'ry thing, that flopp'd in awkward way,  
And climb'd the table where the coffin lay;  
With scaly convolutions strove to find  
The cold, still clay that death had left behind.  
The nodding mother hears—starts broad awake—

Empower'd to reason, yet too stunn'd to shake;  
The pois'nous thing she sees, and nimbly foils  
The ghoulish purpose of the quiv'ring coils:  
With ready axe the serpent's head she cleaves,  
And thrills with savage triumph whilst she grieves.  
The injur'd reptile hissing glides from sight,  
And hides its cloven carcass in the night.

The weeks slipp'd by, and gossip's tongue began  
To call the Sieur De Blois an alter'd man;  
With curious mien he oft would pace along  
The village street, and eye the gaping throng.  
Yet whilst he shew'd himself as ne'er before,  
His wild-eyed lady was observ'd no more.  
In course of time, 'twas scarce thought odd or ill  
That he his ears with village lore should fill;  
Nor was the town with special rumour rife  
When he sought out the bailiff and his wife:  
Their tale of sorrow, with its ghastly end,  
Was told, indeed, by ev'ry wond'ring friend.  
The Sieur heard all, and low'ring rode away,  
Nor was he seen again for many a day.

When vernal sunshine shed its cheering glow,  
And genial zephyrs blew away the snow,  
To frighten'd swains a horror was reveal'd  
In the damp herbage of a melting field.  
There (half preserv'd by winter's frigid bed)  
Lay the dark Dame De Blois, untimely dead;  
By some assassin's stroke most foully slain,  
Her shapely brow and temples cleft in twain.  
Reluctant hands the dismal burden bore  
To the stone arches of the husband's door,  
Where silent serfs the ghastly thing receiv'd,  
Trembling with fright, but less amaz'd than griev'd;  
The Sieur his dame beheld with blazing eyes,  
And shook with anger, more than with surprise.  
(At least 'tis thus the stupid peasants told  
Their wide-mouth'd wives when they the tale unroll'd.)  
The village wonder'd why De Blois had kept

His spouse's loss unmention'd and unwept,  
Nor were there lacking sland'rous tongues to claim  
That the dark master was himself to blame.  
But village talk could scarcely hope to solve  
A crime so deep, and thus the months revolve:  
The rural train repeat the gruesome tale,  
And gape and marvel more than they bewail.

Swift flew the sun, and winter once again  
With icy talons gripp'd the frigid plain.  
December brought its store of Christmas cheer,  
And grateful peasants hail'd the op'ning year;  
But by the hearth as Candlemas drew nigh,  
The whisp'ring ancients spoke of things gone by.  
Few had forgot the dark demoniac lore  
Of things that came the Candlemas before,  
And many a crone intently eyed the house  
Where dwelt the sadden'd bailiff and his spouse.  
At last the day arriv'd, the sky o'erspread  
With dark'ning messengers and clouds of lead;  
Each neighb'ring grove Aeolian warnings sigh'd,  
And thick'ning terrors broadcast seem'd to bide.  
The good folk, tho' they knew not why, would run  
Swift past the bailiff's door, the scene to shun;  
Within the house the grieving couple wept,  
And mourn'd the child who now forever slept.  
On rush'd the dusk in doubly hideous form,  
Borne on the pinions of the gath'ring storm;  
Unusual murmurs fill'd the rainless wind,  
The rising river lash'd the troubled shore;  
Black thro' the night the awful storm-god prowld,  
And froze the list'ners' life-blood as he howl'd;  
Gigantic trees like supple rushes sway'd,  
Whilst for his home the trembling cotter pray'd.  
Now falls a sudden lull amidst the gale;  
With less'ning force the circling currents wail;  
Far down the stream that laves the neighb'ring mead  
Burst a new ululation, wildly key'd;  
The peasant train a frantic mien assume,  
And huddle closer in the spectral gloom:

To each strain'd ear the truth too well is known,  
For that dread sound can come from wolves alone!  
The rustics close attend, when ere they think,  
A lupine army swarms the river's brink;  
From out the waters leap a howling train  
That rend the air, and scatter o'er the plain:  
With flaming orbs the frothing creatures fly,  
And chant with hellish voice their hungry cry.  
First of the pack a mighty monster leaps  
With fearless tread, and martial order keeps;  
Th' attendant wolves his yelping tones obey,  
And form in columns for the coming fray:  
No frighten'd swain they harm, but silent bound  
With a fix'd purpose o'er the frozen ground.  
Straight course the monsters thro' the village street,  
Unholy vigour in their flying feet;  
Thro' half-shut blinds the shelter'd peasants peer,  
And wax in wonder as they lose in fear.  
Th' excited pack at last their goal perceive,  
And the vex'd air with deaf'ning clamour cleave;  
The churls, astonish'd, watch th' unnatural herd  
Flock round a cottage at the leader's word:  
Quick spreads the fearsome fact, by rumour blown,  
That the doom'd cottage is the bailiff's own!  
Round and around the howling daemons glide,  
Whilst the fierce leader scales the vine-clad side;  
The frantic wind its horrid wail renews,  
And mutters madly thro' the lifeless yews.  
In the frail house the bailiff calmly waits  
The rav'ning horde, and trusts th' impartial Fates,  
But the wan wife revives with curious mien  
Another monster and an older scene;  
Amidst th' increasing wind that rocks the walls,  
The dame to him the serpent's deed recalls:  
Then as a nameless thought fills both their minds,  
The bare-fang'd leader crashes thro' the blinds.  
Across the room, with murd'rous fury rife,  
Leaps the mad wolf, and seizes on the wife;  
With strange intent he drags his shrieking prey  
Close to the spot where once the coffin lay.

Wilder and wilder roars the mounting gale  
That sweeps the hills and hurtles thro' the vale;  
The ill-made cottage shakes, the pack without  
Dance with new fury in demoniac rout.  
Quick as his thought, the valiant bailiff stands  
Above the wolf, a weapon in his hands;  
The ready axe that serv'd a year before,  
Now serves as well to slay one monster more.  
The creature drops inert, with shatter'd head,  
Full on the floor, and silent as the dead;  
The rescu'd wife recalls the dire alarms,  
And faints from terror in her husband's arms.  
But as he holds her, all the cottage quakes,  
And with full force the titan tempest breaks:  
Down crash the walls, and o'er their shrinking forms  
Burst the mad revels of the storm of storms.  
Th' encircling wolves advance with ghastly pace,  
Hunger and murder in each gleaming face,  
But as they close, from out the hideous night  
Flashes a bolt of unexpected light:  
The vivid scene to ev'ry eye appears,  
And peasants shiver with returning fears.  
Above the wreck the scatheless chimney stays,  
Its outline glimm'ring in the fitful rays,  
Whilst o'er the hearth still hangs the household shrine,  
The Saviour's image and the Cross divine!  
Round the blest spot a lambent radiance glows,  
And shields the cotters from their stealthy foes:  
Each monstrous creature marks the wondrous glare,  
Drops, fades, and vanishes in empty air!  
The village train with startled eyes adore,  
And count their beads in rev'rence o'er and o'er.  
Now fades the light, and dies the raging blast,  
The hour of dread and reign of horror past.  
Pallid and bruis'd, from out his toppled walls  
The panting bailiff with his good wife crawls:  
Kind hands attend them, whilst o'er all the town  
A strange sweet peace of spirit settles down.  
Wonder and fear are still'd in soothing sleep,  
As thro' the breaking clouds the moon rays peep.



Here paus'd the prattling grandam in her speech,  
Confus'd with age, the tale half out of reach;  
The list'ning guest, impatient for a clue,  
Fears 'tis not one tale, but a blend of two;  
He fain would know how far'd the widow'd lord  
Whose eerie ways th' initial theme afford,  
And marvels that the crone so quick should slight  
His fate, to babble of the wolf-wrack'd night.  
The old wife, press'd, for greater clearness strives,  
Nods wisely, and her scatter'd wits revives;  
Yet strangely lingers on her latter tale  
Of wolf and bailiff, miracle and gale.  
When (quoth the crone) the dawn's bright radiance bath'd  
Th' eventful scene, so late in terror swath'd,  
The chatt'ring churls that sought the ruin'd cot  
Found a new marvel in the gruesome spot.  
From fallen walls a trail of gory red,  
As of the stricken wolf, erratic led;  
O'er road and mead the new-dript crimson wound,  
Till lost amidst the neighb'ring swampy ground:  
With wonder unappeas'd the peasants burn'd,  
For what the quicksand takes is ne'er return'd.

Once more the grandam, with a knowing eye,  
Stops in her tale, to watch a hawk soar by;  
The weary list'ner, baffled, seeks anew  
For some plain statement, or enlight'ning clue.  
Th' indulgent crone attends the puzzled plea,  
Yet strangely mutters o'er the mystery.  
The Sieur? Ah, yes—that morning all in vain  
His shaking servants scour'd the frozen plain;  
No man had seen him since he rode away  
In silence on the dark preceding day.  
His horse, wild-eyed with some unusual fright,  
Came wand'ring from the river-bank that night.  
His hunting-hound, that mourn'd with piteous woe,  
Howl'd by the quicksand swamp, his grief to shew.  
The village folk thought much, but utter'd less;  
The servants' search wore out in emptiness:

For Sieur De Blois (the old wife's tale is o'er)  
Was lost to mortal sight for evermore.



# About this digital edition

This e-book comes from the online library [Wikisource](#). This multilingual digital library, built by volunteers, is committed to developing a free accessible collection of publications of every kind: novels, poems, magazines, letters...

We distribute our books for free, starting from works not copyrighted or published under a free license. You are free to use our e-books for any purpose (including commercial exploitation), under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Unported](#) license or, at your choice, those of the [GNU FDL](#).

Wikisource is constantly looking for new members. During the transcription and proofreading of this book, it's possible that we made some errors. You can report them at [this page](#).

The following users contributed to this book:

- [Illuminati96](#)
- [Postmortem2](#)